



**THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS  
WASHINGTON**

August 26, 2013

*Pat*

The Honorable Henry A. Waxman  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Waxman:

Thank you for your letter requesting that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) implement a special pilot program at the Los Angeles Regional Office (RO) to expedite the processing of claims for homeless and terminally ill Veterans. I appreciated the recent opportunity to meet with you, Senator Feinstein, and Supervisor Yaroslavsky to discuss Veterans' issues in the Los Angeles area.

Ending Veteran homelessness in 2015 continues to be a top priority for VA, and there has been a 17 percent decrease in Veteran homelessness since 2009. VA has a common sense approach focused first on housing homeless Veterans, and then meeting their clinical and other needs. We continue to push for early detection of housing instability, allowing us to help prevent Veteran homelessness in the first place. The Department of Housing and Urban Development recently approved \$60 million in assistance toward finding permanent housing for homeless Veterans; this will assist approximately 9,000 of the Nation's estimated 60,000 homeless Veterans.

All VA regional offices give priority attention to claims from homeless Veterans. We also provide special handling of claims from seriously wounded, ill, and injured Servicemembers separating through the Integrated Disability Evaluation System; those experiencing extreme financial hardship; the terminally ill; former Prisoners of War; Medal of Honor recipients; and Veterans filing Fully Developed Claims. In addition, we work with our Federal partners and community organizations to ensure Veterans who do not qualify for VA benefits still receive access to non-VA care and benefits.

As mentioned in your letter, the area served by the Los Angeles RO has the highest homeless Veteran population in the Nation. Our actions to address this critical problem include the establishment of the new West LA Integrated Homeless Veterans Center, Building 402, which will open this fall. This "one-stop shop" will provide team-based care and expanded access to benefits and non-VA legal assistance. The Center will include representatives from the Los Angeles RO, Social Security Administration, LA County Department of Mental Health, California Department of Veterans Affairs, and pro bono legal services.

The Los Angeles RO is taking specific action to expedite homeless Veterans' claims. At the beginning of fiscal year (FY) 2011, the Los Angeles RO had a pending inventory of 326 homeless Veterans' claims, which averaged 127 days to complete. By the beginning of FY 2012, the number of pending homeless Veterans' claims had been reduced to 219, and it took an average of 102.5 days to complete these claims. At the start of FY 2013, the number of pending homeless Veteran claims at the Los Angeles RO had been further reduced to 158 and averaged 79.7 days to complete.

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In January 2013, the Los Angeles RO completed Station Enrichment Training, an intensive training curriculum designed to improve the skills and competencies of claims processors. As a result of the standardized training, the Los Angeles RO has made great advancements in both the accuracy of its decisions and increased production. At the beginning of FY 2012, the Los Angeles RO had a cumulative accuracy rate of 75.1 percent. Currently, the Los Angeles RO's cumulative 12-month accuracy rate is 89.5 percent, reflecting a steady increase toward the goal of 98 percent accuracy in 2015. The Los Angeles RO's monthly production continues to meet or exceed its established targets. Within the last 12 months, the inventory of pending claims at the Los Angeles RO was reduced by 18.2 percent, from 24,690 in June 2012 to 20,193 in June 2013. The Veterans Benefits Administration continues to use additional resources to assist the Los Angeles RO in providing better service to Veterans and their families.

In April 2013, the Los Angeles RO implemented VA's new Transformation Organizational Model that assigns claims to three distinct processing lanes based on their complexity and priority. This new model includes integrated, cross-functional teams to process claims from start to finish, facilitating a quick flow of completed claims that results in minimal rework and reduced processing time. The special operations lane expedites claims for homeless and terminally ill Veterans, as well as other claims requiring special handling and case management. The model is designed to accomplish the kind of special handling for all terminally ill and homeless Veterans suggested in your letter. In addition, the Los Angeles RO has a full-time Homeless Veterans Coordinator to case-manage claims from homeless Veterans.

As a result of our concern regarding the length of time many Veterans are waiting for decisions on their disability claims, VA announced a nationwide initiative in April 2013 to expedite decisions for Veterans who have waited the longest. Additionally, VA announced in May that it was mandating overtime for claims processors in every RO. This surge, which will continue through the end of FY 2013, is helping to eliminate the backlog – with continued emphasis on claims from homeless Veterans and the terminally ill, as well as those from Veterans in other high-priority categories.

VA is closely monitoring the progress of the Los Angeles RO. If you have questions or desire more information, please have your staff contact Mr. John Kruse, Director, Benefits Legislative Service, at (202) 461-6467 or [John.Kruse3@va.gov](mailto:John.Kruse3@va.gov).

Thank you for your continued support of our mission.

Sincerely,



Eric K. Shinseki